

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion – Toldot

God's Wealthy Messengers

וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בְּאֶרֶץ הַחֵוָה וַיִּמְצָא בְּשָׁנָה הַהִוא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיִּבְרַכְהוּ יְהוָה:
וַיִּגְדַּל הָאִישׁ וַיִּלְדָּה הָלוֹךְ וַיִּגְדַּל עַד כִּי־גָדַל מְאֹד:

Isaac sowed in that land and reaped a hundredfold that same year. God blessed him, and he grew richer and richer, until he was very wealthy (Genesis 13:12-13)

AVODAH Commentary: Isaac is not the first of the patriarchs to be described as having great wealth. We find a similar statement about Isaac's father, Abraham:

וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד בְּמִקְנֵהוּ בַכֶּסֶף וּבַזָּהָב:

Abram was very rich in cattle, silver and gold. (Genesis 13:2)

In fact, all of the patriarchs held considerable wealth. Regarding Isaac's son Jacob, we read:

וַיִּפְרָץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד וַיִּהְיֶה־לוֹ צֹאן רַבּוֹת וּשְׂפָחוֹת וַעֲבָדִים וְגַמְלִים וְחֲמֹרִים:

And [Jacob] became exceedingly prosperous... (Genesis 30:43)

Rabbi Yohanan, picking up on and extending the Torah's consistent attribution of wealth to the patriarchs, declares:

אמר ר' יוחנן: כל הנביאים עשירים היו

All of the prophets were wealthy [Bavli Nedarim 38a]

QUESTIONS: Does it change your view of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to think of them as rich people?
How so?

How do you think the wealth of the patriarchs influenced their behavior in the world? Their spiritual lives?

Why would Rabbi Yohanan claim that all of the prophets were wealthy? How would having wealth make the mission of the prophet easier? How would it make the prophet's mission harder.

What attitude towards wealth comes out of these Jewish sources?